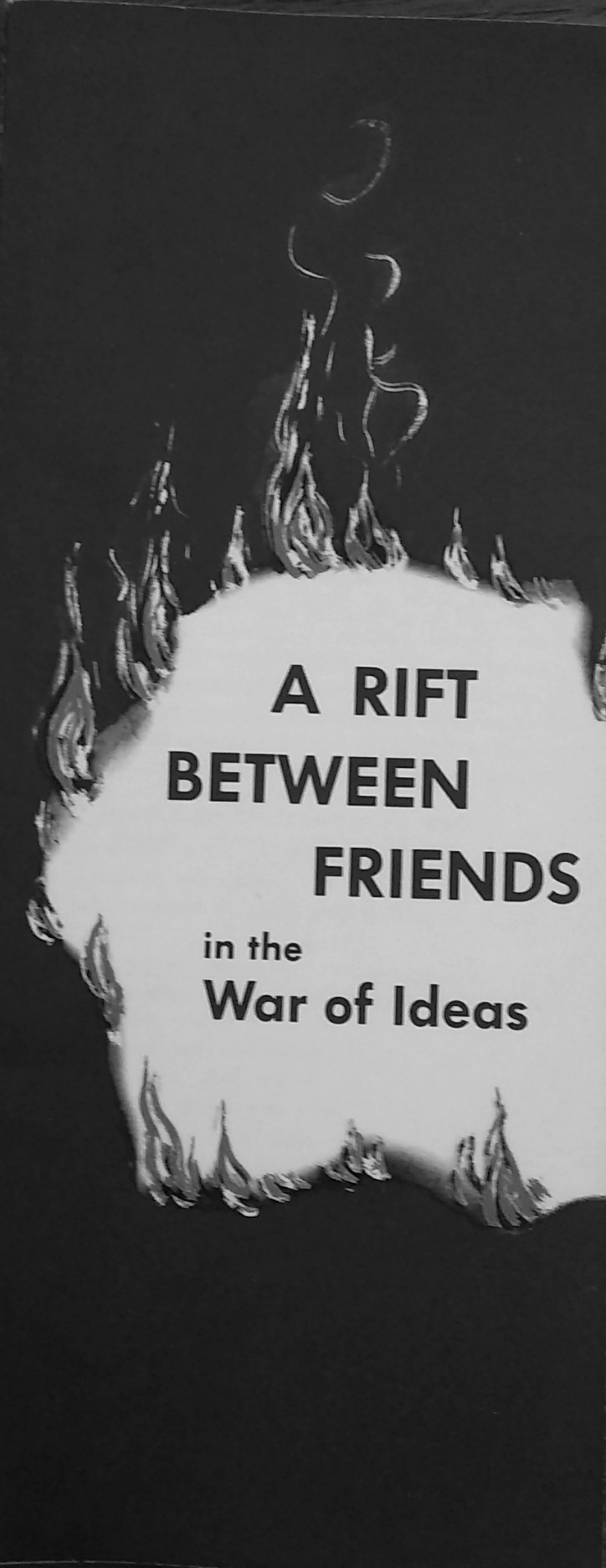

A RIFT
BETWEEN
FRIENDS
in the
War of Ideas

Editor's note: George and Martha are real persons although these are not their real names. The letter addressed to them was written by a graduate of Freedom School and is reproduced in this manner with the permission of the author.

We consider this letter one of the finest we have ever read and hope that you will read it and think deeply about the keenly personal nature of this struggle for the minds of men.

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Dear George and Martha,

I am deeply disturbed by our conversation last night, and just as concerned as I know both of you must be. It seems incredible, after having been so close to you during all the years, that we should now disagree so sharply, that the gulf between us, of which you spoke, should now become almost uncrossable.

I am filled with an inexpressible sorrow that this must be so. Yet, the realization is that it is so—the realization that in the days to come (days which I face with a sense of foreboding and dread) the gulf must inevitably widen unless we can find some means by which we can meet or talk to each other with mutual understanding and respect. In a world like this, it is no longer possible (at least for me) to maintain friendships, loyalties or even family relationships which are based on the superficialities and trivialities characterized by cocktail conversation while underneath we maintain a total opposition to each other upon fundamental problems which concern our very existence.

Oddly enough, and sadly, neither of you disagrees with me on these fundamentals. Actually, we agree. Yet, paradoxically, the gulf between us exists and widens. How can this be?

I say to you—"We believe that each of us must be responsible for his acts, and his life; that unless each individual is responsible and held responsible for his actions by his fellows, that neither the individual nor his social group can ever achieve anything worthwhile." You say—"Of course, that is true. We all know that."

I say—"I must teach my children responsibility. I must teach them values. I must give them a moral code by which they can determine and judge what is right and what is wrong. I must teach them to respect their own lives and their own property and the property and lives of others. I must teach them that they deserve only what they earn, and that what they achieve can only be done through education, self-discipline and

the maximum development of their own ability. I must discipline them in these matters so that they may achieve, as adults, the self-discipline which is absolutely imperative to any human if he is to become a responsible and self-respecting being. I must teach them these things because these are the attributes from which arise all that is noble in man, and which give him what we call human dignity, incentive, understanding and compassion." In all this I know that each of you will most definitely and sincerely agree.

I say further: "What is true for my children is true for all children, that if most of the citizens of the community, or of the state (nation) do not follow these same principles, then the community and the nation cannot achieve anything but chaos which no amount of law and order can control." In this, too, I am sure you will agree with me.

Yet, and this is the crux of the matter, when I say further that "government (that is the policy and beliefs of men in government today) is systematically destroying every one of these concepts," (it is unimportant whether intentional or unintentional) then it is at this point that the curtain comes down, and the gulf between us begins. "Politics!"—you say, and that is your whole and only answer. Without further thought you close the doors of your minds to any further suggestion and dismiss the whole thing with that one single word—"politics." Then as an afterthought, and perhaps regretfully, but with what is to me a terrifying display of infallible self-assurance, you apply the label, Extremist! Reactionary! No further thought is required. Case dismissed.

I cry out to you in anguish and frustration and despair. "It is so much more than that. I only want to live. Is that politics? I only want you to understand that we cannot live as decent human beings much longer, if we are to be deprived of our responsibility, our property and our moral code. Is that just politics?" But the door is closed. I cannot reach you. "It cannot happen here in this great country," you say, and the curtain falls.

Let me state my position as briefly and as bluntly as I can. For as long as you believe in the individual human values and rights I have outlined, but insist, out of blind faith and loyalty alone, on sanctioning a group whose every action, if you would but shed your blindness, is dedicated to the destruction of those rights and values; for as long as you make no effort to understand what this revolution which convulses the world is all about, but content yourself with faith in one group and labeling of the other; for just that long the gulf between us must remain and become always wider.

The reason that this is true should be perfectly clear. **It is by your sanction and your easy label, yours and millions of others just like you, that you destroy me and those like me who assume the responsibility, who furnish the ability, and who produce the materials and services you want. The cruel truth is that, even while you destroy us, we are the ones you really believe in and the only ones upon whom you can depend.**

Let me try to explain this. Forget, if you can, party names like Democrat or Republican. We are not concerned here with parties. We are concerned with the basic ideologies and concepts upon which this world conflict hinges.

The issue is as old as recorded history. Simply stated it is nothing more than this: Who is to be responsible? Man? Or Government? In the language of today it is stated in a somewhat more complex manner, but it is basically the same problem which has always plagued man, how to live in an organized society without being crushed by the organization.

We can say, then, that today the issue facing the whole world is: The moral and ethical system of individualism (responsible man) versus the amoral and ethical system of socialism (government assumes responsibility). Individualism embraces the economic system of free enterprise. Socialism embraces the planned economy, which in Russia and China is almost totally planned, through almost complete control or ownership of private property, the means of production. In America, England, Western Europe and all the other countries of today's world, gradual or creeping socialism exists. In these

countries there are varying degrees of ownership and control of the means of production.

You protest to me that you are not socialists. I know that you honestly believe you are not. The word "socialist" is abhorrent to you. The hard fact remains that you are just exactly that—socialists. So was I until I began to examine myself in the hard and unbiased light of reason and logic and exact definition.

Your enigma is this: Each of you in your personal lives and beliefs are almost classical individuals. Both of you accept complete responsibility for your actions, and both of you demand that your personal lives and property be respected just as you respect the lives and property of others. Yet, both of you, by your deeds and actions and sanctions toward people other than yourselves, are almost classical socialists. You demand responsibility of yourselves, your friends and neighbors and all those with whom you associate individually. But when your concern is with people whom you don't know at all and of whom you think vaguely as "the masses" or "the people" or any term which makes a collective unit out of individuals (even your neighbors whom you do know) it is then that you apply an entirely different set of rules and sanctions which are the exact opposite of those rules and sanctions you apply to yourselves. It is this vast split in your thought patterns which allows you to agree with me up to a point and then impels you to abruptly or casually pull down the curtain and admit no further reasoning.

I know of no man, George, who more admirably fulfills what the individualist terms the epitome of success, the self-made man, than you do. I have tremendous admiration for what you were able to accomplish for yourself with only your ability, responsibility and incentive to account for it. I have the deepest and utmost respect for your integrity, self-discipline and the unassuming dignity which seems to characterize everything you do. You are, in all your personal traits, gestures, and accomplishments, everything that I would like to be. Yet, we must disagree, and I am truly sorry that it is so.

You, too, Martha, in a different way, have accomplished as much. Out of poverty,

and a multitude of adversities, you pulled yourself up by your very bootstraps with almost no help or guidance other than your own innate sense of responsibility and self-respect. You, too, are the living proof that individualism is the key to achievement of any kind. I, who shared this with you, have, and have always had, nothing but the most sincere respect for what you have done. Yet, blood ties, shared hardships, personal respect notwithstanding, we, too, come to the edge of parting. We, too, must disagree.

I have puzzled much over this. How is it that two people like you both are, who in yourselves are the living proof of everything I believe in, outside your own personal sphere not only sanction, but sincerely advocate the ideas and causes which over the long run must totally destroy or debase the very foundations upon which your own uniqueness as individuals is based?

I felt that if I could find the answer to this question, then I could begin to understand what has happened to our America, for I know that there are still in this country many millions of people who, just like you and Martha, have one set of standards for your personal lives and another diametrically opposing set for your extrapersonal existence. I know, too, that, oddly, most of you are totally unaware of these two sets of antagonistic standards, and that those who are aware, have by a process of rationalization and the substitution of faith for reason, compartmentalized and/or ignored the incompatibilities in such a way that they can live with them in reasonable comfort.

Some years ago, George, you gave me the clue through which I have finally solved, at least to my own satisfaction, this dilemma. You were discussing and defending social security. You told me the story of a man whom you had known for many years, a good honest man, hard working, loyal, undemanding, who for one reason or another had never been able to save anything for his old age. You felt that he, and the millions like him, deserved something better than a beggar's existence in their old age, and you wanted to help him. The story stuck with me. I knew that the answer to my question was in this story if I could only find it.

Not too long ago I was reading something written back in the late twenties or early thirties by that amiable and honest socialist, Norman Thomas. He said, in effect, the American people will never accept socialism as a system as long as it is called socialism. But they will buy it entirely if you disguise it and call it humanitarianism. I read this, I remembered your story, and suddenly I understood you and Martha, George, and most of the millions of others including myself.

I had been unable to discover it before because the fault lay not where I expected it, in your weaknesses, but stemmed entirely from your great strength. It arose from one of your finest virtues, and that is your very human compassion. I say this with humility and respect. I say this, I think, with understanding, because my own misguided love for humanity has garnered many a memoir encased in bitter wormwood.

Let me say with honest and respectful candor that it was your great capacity for compassion which betrayed you and which finally allowed you to be persuaded that it was right and proper to use organized force and coercion to make that group of people save, who for some reason either could not or would not save of their own volition. **Once that decision was made, once that bridge was crossed, then other decisions and other actions involving your interpretation of what was the good of social groups, and the use of legal force to dispense it, became easier and easier.** You did it for the most sincere and seemingly noblest of reasons—humanitarianism—but when you bypassed the individual and embraced legislation and force as a means of doing good for this group or that, you became, however unwittingly, a socialist.

When you, and men like you and me, decided that this fine old man of whom you spoke and others like him, should be forced to save his money, the decision we actually made was this: "Man is not responsible for his acts, therefore, we must find a way to protect him." By the addition of government intervention to this decision, the use of force, we said in effect: "All men are not responsible, therefore, government must assume responsibility for all men." This last statement is true because the law cannot,

by its nature, make a single exception, it cannot declare one man responsible and another irresponsible, else it is not a law. By that single decision, by that one erroneous assumption began the fateful process of destroying the basic ingredient in the American character which made him for a while one of the great people of the earth. That ingredient was responsibility. "Root, hog, or die," he used to say. He knew it was up to him. As a group they were strong, unafraid, self-reliant, confident, and "beholden" to no one but themselves. "I'll take charity from no one, man or government," was a common expression when the handouts first began. That expression died quickly.

Even before this happened we had already laid the foundation by which government could assume this responsibility, when in 1913 we sanctioned the income tax and the federal reserve system. The graduated income tax provided the government with the means by which they could, by persuasion, vote themselves any amount of money taken from those who worked to give to those for whom, later on, we humanitarians were going to feel so sorry. The federal reserve system gave the government a total monopoly on money and credit.

With these two powers, not only could we eventually control the economy, we could also manipulate it.

In the 1930's, humanitarianism really began to bloom. That was when we decided it was proper to force people like your friend to save. We began by taking just a little property from every working man's pay check to make him save. We called it his social security.

The depression was on, unemployment had risen to an all time high of 20%. The fact that nobody starved and no one was actually starving was unimportant. We felt sorry for those people. So having already made the decision that man was not responsible, it was relatively easy to make the decision that we should take care of those people who weren't working; that we must relieve them of their responsibility. So we told the man who was working—"You have no right to all of your property when these people have no property; you have no right to all the products of your ability when we have

ple who seem to have no ability; you have no right to save this money for your children when these people aren't saving; so we'll take part of what you earn, whether you like it or not, and we'll give it to all those poor folks who aren't working. It will just be a little bit and you won't miss it." That year it didn't cost much, as costs go. But 30 years later welfare alone costs us more than five billion dollars per year.

Have we really helped these people? Look at them well. Consider this specimen who is the end result of our pity! What can we say of this third generation of people to whom welfare has long since become a way of life? Observe carefully our handiwork whom we have spawned and are spawning by the millions, even in times of plenty!

They do not work and will not. Heads down, unmindful, they have neither pride nor self-respect. They are totally unreliable, not maliciously so, but like cattle who wander aimlessly. Foresight and the ability to reason have simply atrophied from long neglect. Talk to them, listen to them, work with them as I do and you realize with a kind of dull horror that they have lost all semblance of human beings except that they stand on two feet and talk—like parrots. "More. Give me more. I need more," are the only new thoughts they have learned.

This is what we do to those fine old people like your friend, George. This is our own special, 20th century, remodeled version of that man, these poor, miserable, degraded, shuffling, subhuman creatures. They stand today as a monumental caricature of homo sapiens, the harsh and horrible reality created by us out of our own misguided pity. They are also, if we continue our present course, the living prophecy of what a great percentage of the rest of us will become.

"Pity the farmer," we said. "Pity the working man." "Pity the low wage groups." "Pity the underdeveloped nations." "Pity the Negro." Pity! Pity! Pity!

"To help others you must sacrifice yourselves," we said. Then by that peculiar logic premised on that first erroneous assumption, we used force and ordered the sacrifice of all those who had ability. The responsible became the sacrificial victims. We drain ever more and more of their life-blood from

them; we carry it with outstretched hands to the irresponsible and, out of that same peculiar logic we say, "This is yours. We owe it to you. Take it and rise."

With the direct logic of irresponsibility they take it greedily in hands that have neither knowledge, nor ability, nor responsibility, nor incentive, nor the discipline of self-restraint, and they fling it riotously, willy-nilly, to the four winds. But they do not rise. They sink further into helpless degradation. They come back snarling, "Give me more. It is my right. I want more."

We have done it all over the world. Every responsible person and every responsible nation on the face of the earth has been our sacrificial victim—from Belgium to the Congo, from France to North Africa, from America to China, to Korea, to Viet Nam, to Laos, to Cuba, Peru: There is now no place left we haven't done this. Did you ever hear of the Marxist doctrine, "From each according to his ability to each according to his need?" Here is your humanitarianism, George.

For thirty years we have pitied and for thirty years we have used force to take more and more from the man who still believes and still keeps hopefully trying to earn what he gets and get what he earns—thirty years ago we took approximately 10% of his earnings—today we take 35%.

It takes money to do all these humanitarian things. Money is property. Property is the means of production. Socialism is the ownership or control of the means of production. Humanitarianism, by force, becomes, by taxation, the means of controlling production. Humanitarianism, by force, therefore, is socialism. Communist Poland, George, where people like you and me are virtual slaves, owns or controls 59% of the means of production. Will you venture a prediction for us if we pity for another 30 years at our present rate?

While we have been pitying, a new cry develops. The various objects of our pity, from whom we have removed by decree, the sense of individual responsibility, the sense of respect for ownership of private property, and the sense of self-respect, now organize into groups. "We know our rights!" they cry. "More. Give us more!" For every demand

...net, three more arise to take its place. "Think of our needs!" they cry. "That group has more than this group!" "It is not fair!" "We demand what is ours, by right and we want it now!" "Take from that group. It's their fault. Take from this group. They stole what was ours." They stage sit-ins and lie-ins; sit-downs and lie-downs; marches-out and marches-on: There are always more mobs, bigger mobs, jeering mobs, threatening mobs, violent mobs.

How do hate groups arise? Don't blame some ridiculous name you have coined like right-wing, or reactionary. We created them all. You and I, with pity backed by force. Can you take from one man, his property, and give it to another without creating hatred? Can you favor one group at the expense of another without making enemies? Why are you surprised that law and order break down? What can we logically expect, Martha, but more violence? I told you this was only the beginning of violence – not the end. Can't you see why?

Did you ever stop to think, Martha, what happens to men and women (which after all is all that society consists of, though we seem to think of society today as something above and beyond the sum of the individuals which comprise it) when you deny them their rights of individual responsibility and the right to sustain their own lives (i.e. to own property)? Have you ever stopped to ask what it is that makes people moral? What allows them to develop a moral code? Have you ever wondered how people develop a sense of what is right and what is wrong? You would agree that it is wrong to murder, wrong to steal, wrong to cheat, wrong to covet. Why? Morality, as we have practiced it from time immemorial, has been based on the mutual respect of each man for the property of any other man. To trespass the property lines of another man is immoral. Life, ideas, contracts are individual properties just as is land and its derivatives. To kill, to steal, to covet, are trespasses of the property of another. From man's sense of responsibility come the restraints by which he controls himself and respects the property lines of all others. Don't you see that when government trespasses his property by force and tells him it is not his right to own it, it destroys every means he has to be

moral or to judge what is right and wrong? Then by removing those forces (responsibility) by which he governs (restrains) himself, he is reduced to nothing more than a predatory animal who judges right and wrong only by what he thinks he needs and wants, and if it takes murder, or stealing or cheating to get what he wants, this is right to him. Have you wondered why morality is declining today? You did it. You and I by our sanctions.

You say that society today is too complex, that we must sanction all these laws and all this government. You contradict yourself. If it is too complex to be run by all men, then by the same logic it would certainly be even more unlikely that a few men could do better. You say the solution is to give the power to a few men (and nearly always these do not represent the best minds for running anything) and turn them loose with something which by your own admission is too complex for them to possibly understand. Don't you see that the complexity arises from men who do not and cannot understand all things trying to make laws and lay down rules and that each new law and new ruling dislocates something in the economy or in the lives of people which requires new laws and new rules in never-ending succession? Don't you see that this is what has happened to every civilization; that it kept making new laws and new rules until man's (the individual) responsibility and his incentives were so completely destroyed he could no longer produce, and the civilization then had to fail?

"Freedom for all mankind. Freedom for all the struggling masses of the world" is the cry of these humanitarians whom you sanction in our government and all the governments of today's world. Don't you see that these noble words which put hope in each man's soul and which delude him into following, are but empty words? Don't you see that the freedom the humanitarians are trying to achieve can only mean the freedom of some (i.e. those in government who use force) to do as they please with other men and the product of other men's labor? Don't you see that the freedom of which they speak so glowingly can only mean freedom for the few at the price of enslavement of the many?

of people have we become—who think only in clichés, who judge only by states and authority, who damn others by groups with the easy slander of hateful epithets? How did we get this way?

Once we were a proud people. Once upon a time we held our heads high and bowed to no one. We did not judge individuals by groups, but rather we judged each man for his actions regardless of the group with which we might think him to be associated. Now it is different. Now we aren't responsible. Thought is too difficult, reason too arduous, so we classify people by groups and then damn the groups. "It isn't our fault," you say. "It's the fault of someone else. It's that bunch of extremists over there, they did it." Or "those reactionaries over there, they did it. I didn't do it. It wasn't my fault. I'm not responsible."

Every time I have talked to you in the past two years, Martha, you have told me either directly or by inference that I am a reactionary, an extremist. You have never defined exactly what these terms mean to you. Using them as you do is simply your way of justifying your own position without really thinking about it. When I called you just after the President was murdered, the first thing you said to me was: "The right-wing extremists did it. They killed him." To be perfectly consistent, you would have to say that I killed him or, at least, that I was capable of having done so. I know you well enough to know that such a thought never entered your mind, but by your casual label, by your easy damning by group of everyone who differs with you, that is exactly what you say.

Yet, you say you are going to be lonely because of this gulf between us. What is it you want? Do you want the right to classify me with the murderers and then ask me to love you, all at the same time?

I ask again—what kind of people have we become?

We are lost here in America. For one shining, glorious moment of history, we had the key and the open door, and the way was there before us. Men threw off the yoke of centuries and thrust forward along that way with such hope and such brilliance that for a little while we were the light and the inspiration of the world.

Now, the key has been thrown carelessly aside. The door is closed, and we have lost the way. Men who hoped, now sadly put back over their shoulders the old hopeless yoke of the centuries and trudge their mindless way along a path that has no beginning and no end.

You say, "Why get upset? Don't worry about it. It isn't that important. Take a vacation and forget the whole thing. It can't happen here."

Surely, logical discussion based on intensive study, honest questions, and stated convictions from one whose sincerity and integrity you have never questioned, requires a more reasonable and considerate answer than: "Take a vacation, you must be sick." Yet, it is not your words which become the force which alienates us. It is your attitude, your unshakable complacency, upheld only by blind faith in an authority which has long since deserted you, which allows you to thus insult both intelligence and integrity without realizing you have done so and without meaning to do it. You drive me away because it never occurred to you, for one moment, that I might be right, it only occurs to you that I must be sick. This is the strangest and the saddest of our differences.

I am not sick at mind, my dear Martha, but I am profoundly sick at heart. Let me tell you why.

There is no sorrow greater than comes to one who sees the very foundations of the land he loved with his whole heart and mind crumble needlessly into ruin; there is no deadlier despair than that wrung from the bitter realization that for each of us the promise and the hope are gone, those magic beacons which suffused the land with the radiance of grandeur and of greatness; there is no grief more desolate than comes to one who is forced to watch with a terrible and helpless clarity of vision, the inexorable moral decay and degradation of a once proud people, the very bone and sinew of his being, who found the way and now have lost it.

This is your truth as well as mine. Must we then quarrel?

This is my answer and my plea.

I ask only that you try to understand.

Sincerely,
(Name Withheld)

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